WHAT IS HAPPENING IN WORLD OF ART

Drawing by Arthur B. Davis in exhibition at the Carroll Galleries.

THE Panama pictures by Jonas Lie, now on view at Knoedler's, are valiant, ambitious works, sure to interest the public in general, sure to disturb the lover of things sedate in art, sure to create a little talk, and reasonably sure to be remembered once seen.

The subject is a formidable one. That gigantic Culebra cut was the death of French engineers and almost the death of ours. The cutting away of mountains in one place to let an ocean pass and the building of mountainous concrete walls to hold another ocean in check are mighty themes. It is the day of great themes and big undertakings, but this one is really too big for any one save an uncanny engineer to grasp, and engineers, as we all know, are no longer human.

But Mr. Lie, an artist, would go them one better. He would read their plans, understand their work, look upon it, and even, mirabile dictu, make distant New Yorkers comprehend it. Like a young David, Mr. Lie journeyed down to the tropics last spring to tackle this most Goliathan of tasks, and now returns to us with these trophies of the combat, big canvases in swaggering color, showing terrifying man made chasms through the tropical green hills still in active eruption or disruption, with black smoke and steam "belching," to use the favorite adjective of volcano describers, from the fissures, and the tiny little people who are accomplishing the wonder crawling about like ants. If Mr. Lie does not succeed in making New Yorkers comprehend it he will at least make them gasp.

Not but that we have grown used to looking like ants. Any artist who endeavors to make a picture of a New York lady entering an office building is invariably discomfited at the necessarily tiny proportions he is obliged to give the lady. The lady is so small she doesn't count.

The same thing happens to the laborers in our canal. It is beyond the human proportion.

To illustrate and give an idea of canal cutting by painting a picture of a man with a hoe would be absurd. To assemble the thousands necessary to that canal job would be equally poor matter artistically. Failing the human element we are fain to make a second choice for hero of this drama out of steam. Mr. Lie convinces us it is even beyond the steam engine proportion. A steam engine puffs at the base of the giant gates to the lock, in the most "epic" of the canvases, and appears by contrast to be almost as puny as the miserable human beings.

Mr. Lie has been borrowing a page from Mr. Brangwyn's book in thus singing of sizes. It can't be said that he has exaggerated, as the Britisher does, at least it won't be said by this deponent; but he has purposely chosen vantage grounds for his studies where the heights and depths take on a theatrical aspect. They are not the precise heights and depths that every pilgrim to Panama was privileged to see. Mr. Lie has been "interpreting" like an artist rather than recording a working and authentic history of the digging.

The gates at Pedro Miguel are not only superhuman in size but have been taken by the artist at a moment when they had been freshly painted in scarlet. Filling most of the canvas, encased in scaffolding, with sunlight adding still more power to the reds, it can be understood that this picture catches the eye. The enormous water gates are not quite closed at the centre and through the slit one sees the edges of inner gates looming still higher into the air, painted in deep crimson and blackish purples, so dramatically that the sensitive could easily imagine it the entrance to some new and modern inferno rather than what it is, a mere peg in a peaceful waterway, constructed for purposes of trade by the merchants of the world.

The inferno influence is seen again in the picture of the "Culebra Cut," where the dozen or so steam shovels are manfully on the job sending parallel columns of bituminous smoke straight into the heavens, and in the "Cranes at Miraflores," where the iron buckets upon invisible wires descend from out of the top of the picture upon their mysterious and unerring guests for dirt.

They are painted not with any great love for the mechanics that guide these shovels and buckets. The engineering mind that devises these latter day marvels will gasp, along with the everyday mortals, at the almost disdainful freedom with which these instruments have been brushed in. In an exhibition earlier in the season in the Dudesink Galleries Mr. Prettyman showed a courage equal to Mr. Lie's in tackling the Panama Canal construction in water colors. Mr. Prettyman showed a disposition to stick closer to the actual facts of rivets and bolts and that sort of thing than has the valiant Mr. Lie. If both are bidding for historical attention it is likely that Mr. Prettyman, with his greater attention to exact measurements, will gain the highest place. For the immediate purpose of beguiling the passing throng Mr. Lie, however, gets nearer to it, scores in fact a bullseye.

It can be easily foretold that they will have a decided value for exhibition purposes for several years to come. Now that the water has been turned into the canal these steam shovels have had to get from there, so Mr. Lie's pictures of them must be accepted not only as the most ambitious but as the last account of them. The whole country likes to gasp at works of art as much as we New Yorkers do, and we haven't had a chance at awful art—we mean awe producing art—since the far away days of the Verestchagin battle paintings. When the time comes to show them at the fair in San Francisco the success they will have can be imagined. If the fair strikes off medals of honor for the celebrators and celebrities of the canal Mr. Lie will surely get one.

As painting, we like one of the least devilish of these pictures, the "Across the Canal." Not so much emphasis is laid upon the size of the hole in the earth, and the gray brown banks and the vivid green and purple hills in the distance are a mere background for the columns of black smoke that the artist has playfully painted for their own sakes.

TWENTY-SEVEN charming pictures by Alfred Vickers have been placed on public view in the galleries of Moulton & Rickets, 537 Fifth avenue, and will repay study. It is astonishing that this artist is so little known. His work is so unaffected and simple, so modest and Quakerlike in tone, that it can easily be understood how single examples in great exhibitions might escape the eye. Once seen, however, its sheer sincerity and honesty will command respect forever. The present show, the second in this country of this work, comprises twenty-seven examples, mostly landscapes, with a few marines. All of them are interesting and some of them quite exceptional.

Vickers was a self-taught Englishman, born in Surrey in 1786, who was impelled by an enthusiasm acquired, after seeing pictures by George Morlan, to take up the brushes himself. Despite a parental objection to the career he soon gave all his time to the art, going often to the Isle of Wight, of which place he was very fond, visiting North and South Wales, painting scenes on the Thames and old English country lanes with cottages, figures and cattle.

His feeling for nature comes nearer to Constable's than does that of any other English painter, but there is no copying of technique. The trees occasionally remind one of the Constable manner, but then Constable caused all the world to restudy trees. With Vickers it is scarcely a question of brush stroke. He is in love with nature and in love with the subjects he paints, and he cares no more for technique than merely to achieve his work with British thoroughness and completeness. The brightness and freshness to-day of these one hundred year old landscapes attest that, though self-taught, this artist understood paint.

This being in love with his subject sounds academic and for that matter is academic, but the public wouldn't quarrel so much with the classic institutions if they kept up the Vickers tradition. Putting aside the attraction of powerful personalities so potent in the present art fashions, there will always be a value upon a good thing thoroughly well made.

But Vickers is by no means strictly literal. He sings in praise of the land he loves and makes a beautiful report of it. The big canvas of South Wales, "In the Taff Valley," is a delightful scene, which any one would wish to visit, and of which a native could be rightly proud. There are distant hills, fine trees, a foreground lake with cattle in the shallows, and a hint of a comfortable house. It would illustrate admirably and worthily a Wordsworth sonnet.

There are smaller pictures of a wilder character caught from the graces of the Wales that Borrow knew, with swift running brooks and men fishing and roads that invite walking tours, all of them beautifully painted.

It is said that Vickers was utterly neglected during his lifetime, as was Constable. He never received any encouragement from connoisseur or collector, but after his death there was the usual awakening upon the part of the public, with an effort at justice to a dead artist's memory. This has not completely come about yet, but the cataloguer's prediction that in the near future his work will rank with that of Constable, Gainsborough and John Crome is not extravagant.

IT IS not every artist who profits by a one man show. Hugo Ballin, for instance, should avoid them. He is academical fruit. He has won prizes there, and shows there to advantage. Passing as one does at academies between long rows of all sorts of pictures, the Hugo Ballins with their bold designs and bright colors are sure to catch the eye, but in a quiet gallery, with plenty of velvet space around each picture, they do not hold it.

In these days when every artist is a law unto himself and he is most praised who breaks most laws it has grown old fashioned to accuse any one of unsound workmanship. Bad drawing no longer frets us; we call it spirit. Discordant color we pardon because so individual, or emotional, or whatever it is that the artist's friends say it is. But just the same, with all of this liberty, or anarchy, each artist, if you give him time, makes rules for himself, and by these he is judged. In the seventeen pictures of Mr. Ballin, now to be seen in the Montross Gallery, it is the self-imposed rules he breaks. Except in one or two instances out of seventeen he doesn't arrive at his own standard.

The standard is meant to be a high one. That is as it should be. Nobody flies high who doesn't plan for high flights. The pictures when at their best suggest pale strains of something seen at Venice. There is a hint here of a Bellini and a touch there of Titian. That is remarkable in these days when Jonas Lie, quite naturally and almost next door, has hitched his muse to a steam shovel. Perhaps we ought to be thankful to one who repeats softly for us something that those Italians once pleased us with, instead of grumbling about lack of finish.

But now that we have said it we insist upon it. These pictures should have more finish. They are built upon that plan and the lack of it leaves them cheap, in some cases blatantly cheap. Most of the nudes and many of the backgrounds are done with a chilly smoothness that suggests porcelain, and the high lights are thrown upon them with a roughness that makes one shrink. By the time you are far enough away from the canvases to lose the roughness of the high lights you are too far to take any other pleasure in the picture. These touches are so foreign to the rest of the figures that they would seem to have been done afterward by an unsympathetic second party. It is hard to have to insist that necks and shoulders and arms in these paintings are woefully modelled and that distant backgrounds often refuse to go back. It is hard to take these exceptions now because we have lately forgiven these weaknesses in others, but in the present case effects are intended that do not "get over." Sixteenth century solidity cannot be obtained without sixteenth century workmanship.

Mr. Ballin's best assets at present are his sense of arrangement and his ability to get pretty faces. The face, it is true, is almost always the same. But artists are frequently haunted by an ideal, and nobody, for instance, has seriously reproached Rossetti for his "type." The Rossetti type, to again put Mr. Ballin to a severe test, is stronger. We say "beautiful" to Rossetti's Miss Siddal, and that is not the word for Mr. Ballin's ladies, who are nevertheless in strict justice more than pretty.

The finest picture in the lot is almost the smallest, the study of a young girl, very blond as to skin and hair, with questioning, appealing eyes, that is called "Innocence." There is something strange and mystical about the little girl and the means by which the artist achieves this mood are hidden. Even the bowl of flowers which the girl has placed upon a balcony ledge at the base of the picture, seems aloof, old world, like the flowers one sees in the Italian primitives. The dress is of a rich dark blue green, cut low at the neck, and a red thread of a necklace suspends a coin there.

Another picture, called "Youth," competes with it for second place, but is not so complete. "Youth" is a handsome young woman upon upon a balcony, who holds a portfolio with one hand and a warning hourglass with the other. She has red hair and a reddishness to the outlines of the face that imparts to it a Venetian warmth, particularly as the lady's robe and the sky are green. Mr. Ballin is generous with his greens. He loves what is undeniably a pretty combination, the juxtaposition of emerald green with deep blue, but it shouldn't appear in more than one picture in a show, or it becomes a trick.

"Dr. Slops," by George Luks.

Drawing by Arthur B. Davis, in exhibition in the Carroll Galleries.

ART NEWS AND COMMENT.

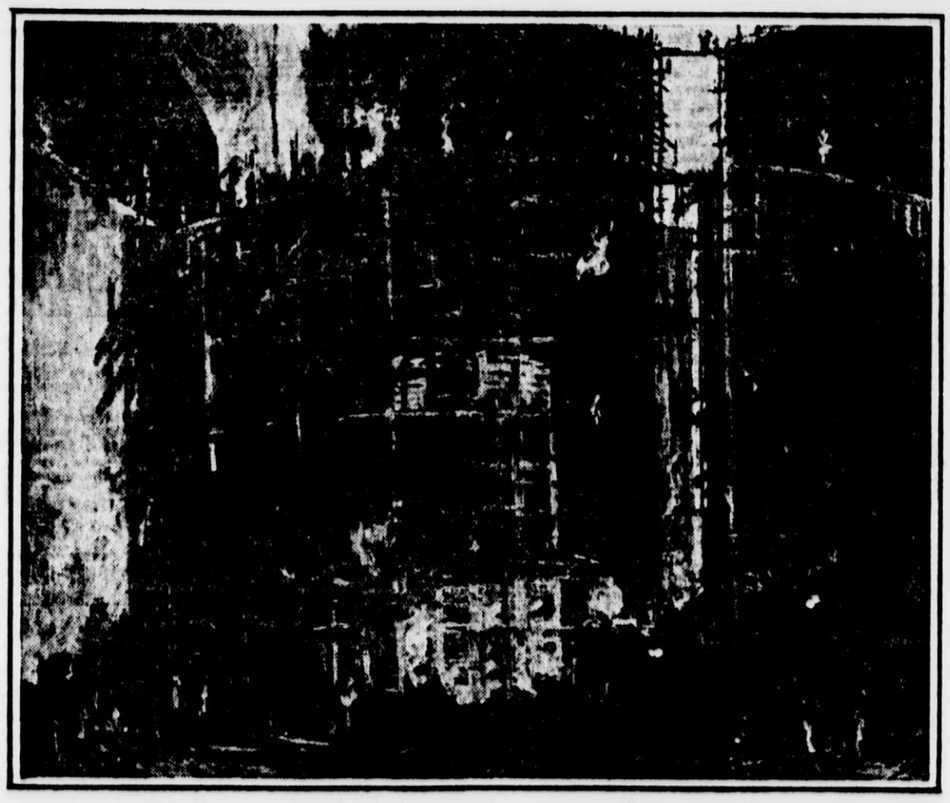
THE Charles Galleries have taken a second gallery upon Fifth avenue, on the corner opposite St. Thomas's Church, for the display of a handsome collection of Oriental porcelains, which Mr. Charles has been some years in collecting.

The installation has been exceedingly carefully managed and the fine bowls and vases are given plenty of space and are most harmoniously grouped. One of the most important items is an unusual garniture of five famille rose vases richly decorated with fighting warriors and "Lange Lyzen." The decoration of these vases is very reminiscent of the Kang-Hsi reign and they are evidently works of the early part of the Yung-Ching reign (1723-1736). These vases were bought from the Princes Ruffo of Sicily, who were viceroys of Sicily under the old Bourbon regime. It is said to be the finest complete garniture known of famille rose on white ground, and it is very much like the famous twenty-two inch famille rose dish in the Morgan collection.

Another interesting piece, showing even more clearly the transition from the famille verte to the famille rose style of decoration, is a large cistern, or gold fish bowl; the outside decoration of this piece is powdered blue with famille rose panels and the interior is decorated with aquatic plants and fish in pure famille verte. As we know from the Jesuit Father d'Entrecolles that the Chinese learned the use of the gold red or rose enamel about 1720, this bowl practically proclaims itself to be the work of the last two years of the Kang-Hsi reign (1662-1722).

The wrought iron railing that formerly surrounded the tomb of Mary Queen of Scots in Westminster Abbey, and which has been on exhibition all winter in the Harding Art Galleries, has been acquired by George Grey Barnard, the sculptor, for his museum. This railing, which was placed in the Abbey in 1613, was removed in 1821 at the time of the coronation of George IV. The railing was sold among a lot of old iron and disappeared from view for many years, only to be recognized by an expert. Its identification was complete, as fortunately accurate drawings of the old railing were in existence in books of its period.

A number of portraits and other paintings by Jeanie Gallup Mottet were placed on view yesterday at the Knoedler Galleries for an exhibition of one week. The effort in them has been chiefly to seize the likeness, and in addition the painting has been attacked with vim and confidence. The style of this artist, however, is by no means finished, and may be said in fact to be in process of formation. Therefore is should be exempt from severe criticism. Mrs. Mottet has a great fondness for vermilion, and while this color undoubtedly lends a great deal of vivacity to a picture, its use is also attended with certain dangers. The plain air figures exhibit quite often a greater warmth in the shadows than in the lights, which is contrary to the teaching of some of the best German professors. However, we must admit that when a red parasol casts a red shadow upon the face of the lady beneath it is difficult to keep that shadow cool. But such subtleties add to the joy of art.



"The Gates of Pedro Miguel," by Jonas Lie.